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Statement by Chief Commissioner Jennifer Lynch, Q.C. at the 19th Session of the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (ICC19)

Geneva, Switzerland
March 19-23, 2007

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Good afternoon colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Canadian Human Rights Commission, I am honoured to accept the role of Chair of the International Coordinating Committee.

I would like to begin by recognizing many whose participation has brought us such an energizing, inspiring and successful session of the ICC.

Over the last four years as you all know, and has been so evident this week, Morten Kjaerum, Anne-Marie Garrido and the staff of the Danish Institute for Human Rights have invested enormously in our ICC work and provided outstanding leadership.

Thank you Morten for your outstanding example as chair of the ICC, and to the Danish Institute for Human Rights for their support. The advancements made under your leadership, Morten, are a true legacy that will endure in the years ahead. I have really big shoes to fill.

I also must commend our colleagues at the Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos de Mexico for undertaking the dual roles of Secretariat to the Network of the Americas, and Vice Chair of the ICC. Doctor Soberanes, Doctor Moctezuma, muchas gracias por su apoyo.

Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to the members of the National Institutions Unit for their invaluable support in preparing each ICC activity: Giani Magazzeni and all of the other team members, thank you. Your tireless work ensures the proper operation of the ICC and its Sub-Committee on Accreditation.

Now as I turn to the future, may I say how much the Canadian Human Rights Commission looks forward to working closely with the National Human Rights Commission of Korea in your role as the Vice Chair of the ICC. We are also so pleased of course to have the support and wise advice of all the members of the Bureau.

Over the years, the ICC has been very successful in creating and strengthening national human rights institutions and helping them to reach conformity with the Paris Principles. Membership in the ICC is accorded growing importance by international and national actors because accreditation as a fully compliant member allows a national human rights institution to participate more actively in the UN Human Rights Council and other international fora.

The role played by National Human Rights Institutions in the development and adoption by the UN General Assembly of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an example of our collective potential to make a difference in the advancement of human rights around the world.

As you know, the Convention is being signed one week from today in New York. I will be proud to represent the ICC on this important occasion.

My hope is that, as we continue to work together, we will continue to influence, through the ICC, other equally powerful changes in human rights thinking and practice. We must actively seek every opportunity to influence these advances in the field of human rights.

In the years ahead, we will develop our priorities together. I would like to share with you my interest and early thinking about three key priorities:

One – The first priority is to strengthen national institutions through a more rigorous, independent and transparent accreditation process. It is the responsibility of the ICC to ensure that our internationally recognized standards are met by our members, through strict adherence to the Paris Principles. The objective however is not to simply have rules for our membership.

We want to increase the number of accredited national institutions. With a stronger accreditation process based on principles recognized by the international community, a growing number of ICC members will have a more credible voice in international fora, including the Human Rights Council.

The Canadian Commission now chairs both the ICC and its Sub-Committee on Accreditation. We want to ensure that there is no real or perceived conflict of interest emerging because of this.

Our priority is to ensure that all ICC members, and others, are confident in the impartiality and credibility of our process.

It is my intention therefore to turn to the Bureau to develop guidelines that can guide our actions until there is a future transition of the Chair of the Sub-Committee to another National Institution. I will also ask the Canadian Commission representatives on the Sub-Committee to discuss this matter with other Committee members.

Two: Second, we will move immediately to continue the work on ensuring that National Institutions have a legitimate and effective, multifaceted role with the Human Rights Council.

We need to be visible, and to participate in debates. We can have a fundamental role in Universal Periodic Reviews, in many stages- preparation, review, dialogue and follow-up.

Having more ICC members actively involved in international fora, bringing forward initiatives and interacting constructively with UN members, will give much needed influence for the advancement of human rights issues at the international level.

Mme Louise Arbour, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights called upon us a few days ago in this same room to

play an active role in key human rights issues, such as the international fight against racism, torture, impunity or for the protection of minorities.

Let us answer her call and ensure that through our various experiences these issues are addressed at the international level and in our own countries so that individuals in need receive greater protection.

We welcome the commitment to a greater engagement that has been expressed by Mme Arbour.

Our dialogue and decision yesterday to have an ICC Chairperson's representative in Geneva is an important step to increase our presence in international fora. I would like to thank all those who offered the support we need in staffing this position.

Three: - Our third early priority will be to work to strengthen the culture of cooperation amongst human rights institutions.

To remain relevant, the ICC must remain inclusive. Each national human rights institution operates in different contexts and has a particular experience. This is a theme that has been raised many times during previous days.

We all have much to contribute to the efforts of the ICC. How can we share what we have learned with one another and with other human rights actors? What are the ways that we can better support each other, and learn from each other?

Let us work together to develop innovative and practical ways to do so, as we advance the role and good practices of national human rights institutions internationally, and our instrumental role in creating strong national human rights protection systems at the country level.

For example, some members could take the lead on substantive issues of particular interest to them and create opportunities to share best practices, others could advance substantive issues by writing position papers, or could join efforts to support threatened member institutions.

The role of the ICC extends beyond our annual meetings, here in Geneva. The ICC primarily provides each of its members with an opportunity to play a catalytic role and generate synergy with myriad human rights stakeholders to bring about concrete changes that will improve the quality of life for innumerable individuals and strengthen our respective countries.

I look forward to working with you, and thank you for all that you have done to welcome me this week, and to inspire me.

Thank you, Merci, Gracias.

Last Updated: 2004-07-06